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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001596

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FOR NEA/ARP, PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2016

TAGS: PREL PTER MARR MOPS ETRD BA REGION BILAT

OFFICIALS

SUBJECT: CROWN PRINCE STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF IDEAS IN WAR
ON TERROR

REF: A. MANAMA 1574
1B. MANAMA 1507

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary

11. (C) Crown Prince Shaikh Salman told the Ambassador August 29 that he was pleased with the August 1 implementation of the U.S.-Bahrain free trade agreement (FTA). He proposed that the Bahrain Navy join one of the coalition task forces coordinated out of Bahrain, in particular CTF-150, which operates outside the Straits of Hormuz. He welcomed adoption of the new counter-terrorism law. Clearly taking the opportunity to refine his message in anticipation of his mid-September visit to Washington, the CP stressed the importance of ideas in fighting terrorism. While not discounting the impact of poor economic growth and lack of transparency, he said the Arab-Israeli situation is the "catalyst for conflict" in the region. The war in Lebanon had propelled Nasrallah into becoming "the Che Guevara of the Arab world." Rather than focusing on the use of force, the United States should devote more diplomacy and energy to a state-by-state approach to governments in the region. Iran is doing a better job with diplomacy than the U.S. When the United States addresses the fundamental concerns of the Arabs, he said, it will be much easier for the Arabs to support U.S. policy on Iran, including war. At this time, the U.S. should focus on economic reform in the region. The main threat is politicized Islam, which must be defeated.
End Summary.

FTA Launch Events

12. (C) The Ambassador opened his August 29 meeting with Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa by congratulating him on the August 1 implementation of the FTA. The CP said he was very pleased the FTA was in effect, saying it marked "a new chapter in our shared history." The Ambassador noted that two FTA-related events would take place on September 14: the inaugural meeting of the U.S.-Bahrain Business Council in Washington, and the FTA launch conference in Manama.

Bahraini Participation in Naval Task Force

13. (C) The CP said he had been speaking with his father King Hamad about increasing cooperation with the United States on the military side. They are interested in having the Bahrain Navy participate in a coalition task force coordinated out of Bahrain, possibly the anti-piracy task force outside the Straits of Hormuz (CTF-150). The CP said he would be in touch with Navcent about this idea.

New CT Legislation "A Good Law"

14. (C) The Crown Prince raised the recently passed counter-terrorism law, calling it a good law (Ref B). In response to the Ambassador's question, the CP said he thinks the conspiracy article of the law (Article 18) will withstand a constitutional challenge. The danger, he said, is in how the conspiracy clause is used. It should not be employed against youths who explode gas cylinders. But it could be used against people with ties to Hizballah and Al Qaeda.

Fighting Terror with Force, Ideas

15. (C) Turning to the war on terror, Shaikh Salman said he was very concerned about what was happening in the region. He maintained that there are two ways to deal with terrorism: using military force, or offering a better idea. Thus far, the focus had been on the use of force. But several issues are not being dealt with, in particular the Arab-Israeli situation, which is "a catalyst for conflict." He does not discount the impact of problems such as lack of economic

growth and transparency, and positive movement in certain areas such as the Middle East Free Trade Area, stabilizing Iraq and "not handing it over to Iran," and helping Turkey combat Kurdish terrorism would all help. But the prime issue, in his view, is the Arab-Israeli conflict.

16. (C) Shaikh Salman complained that Israel did not achieve any of its objectives during the conflict in Lebanon, which he described as degrading Hizballah's capabilities, getting Nasrallah, isolating the Shia, and getting back its captured soldiers. Hizballah, he said, has deep pockets, is driven by ideology, and promotes the perception that it won. Weapons corridors into Lebanon are still open and Iran continues its programs there. Nasrallah is now seen as "the Che Guevara of the Arab world." We are trying to combat this perception, he said, but the way the Israelis withdrew from Lebanon made this task harder.

More Energy to Diplomacy

17. (C) The Crown Prince said there may have been tactical successes against extremists, but "we are losing the war." The consequences of not addressing this challenge are instability in the region and broader military conflict. He suggested that the United States devote more diplomacy and energy to a state-by-state approach to governments in the region. There should be heavier engagement on issues the Arabs think are important. Looking back into history, the CP said that the allies beat Germany and Japan through war, with 60 million dead. But it beat the USSR through ideas. American cultural output is also an important factor - "keep Hollywood going," he said.

18. (C) Shaikh Salman warned that there should be no repeat of the Hizballah action with Iran. Doing so would make President Ahmadinejad into a hero. The U.S. should focus on isolating Iran, but Iran is doing better at diplomacy than the United States. China and Russia "are far from the U.S., the Arabs are confused, and the next UK government will have an anti-U.S. platform." This is not a comfortable position

for Bahrain. If Iran gets nuclear weapons, the international community would have to move to deterrence. When the United States addresses the fundamental concerns of the Arabs, it will be much easier for the Arabs to support U.S. policy on Iran, even a war. But when the Administration talks about freedom, "it falls on deaf ears, people don't buy it."

Positive Regional Role Models

¶ 9. (C) The CP said the United States should do what it can to ensure there are positive role models in the region. At this time, it should put its focus on economic reform. For example, Egypt is demonstrating strong economic growth currently. If that country continues to prosper, it would "remove 50 million people from the terror equation." The main threat in Egypt and other countries is the rise of politicized Islamic leaders. Syria is a good example. If Bashar Al Asad were to go, the Muslim Brotherhood would run the country. Imagine, he said, if Islamic regimes were in charge of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Then the United States and its allies would have to contemplate a real war, total war. The concept of politicized Islam needs to be defeated.

Comment

¶ 10. (C) Robust media coverage of the Ambassador's meetings with the King (septel), Crown Prince, and Prime Minister (Ref A) all in the same week sends a strong signal to Bahrain and the region on the strength of the bilateral relationship, undoubtedly the regime's intention. The CP was also clearly refining his message in anticipation of his mid-September visit to Washington, when he hopes to meet with the Vice President and Secretary Rumsfeld.

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